

## SLEEP

Sleep is something everyone needs, but many don't get enough. As a student, you may know what it means to be sleep deprived due to all the late nights of working or being unable to sleep. Whether it is homework you put off that needs to be done or stress that is keeping you up, sleep is imperative for numerous reasons.

When you're stressed and have multiple tasks to finish before bed, how heavily do you weigh sleep as a priority? Roxanne Prichard, a psychology professor at the University of St. Thomas, mentioned in a report that, "Students underestimate the importance of sleep in their daily lives. They forgo sleep during periods of stress, not realizing that they are sabotaging their physical and mental health." Insufficient sleep negatively affects your well-being.

### How Much Sleep Do I Need?

The recommended amount of sleep for an adult is eight to ten hours in order to function at best. This amount differs for each person, but it is beneficial to know how many hours of sleep are recommended. In a study of 1, 120 students, *Journal of Adolescent Health* found that only 30 percent of students sleep at least eight hours a night.

### Methods for a Better Night's Rest

Although it may seem overwhelming, there are ways to help you get a better night's sleep. By making little adjustments, you'll be able to get more sleep and a better quality of sleep.

1. **Consistent meal schedule** – Eating and sleeping may not seem relevant to each other; however, they are interrelated. By eating at certain times, you can regulate your circadian rhythm which is your "internal biological clock". For example, it is important to eat breakfast because it sets the tone for the rest of the day and gives you energy. A common mistake that many students make is that they will eat late at night. This is a problem because your body is still digesting food while you are trying to sleep.
2. **Sleep schedule** – By establishing a regular bed time and time to wake up, you will be developing a consistent "internal clock" that knows when it is time to sleep. This may help you if you normally have difficulty falling asleep. It is important to find consistent times to go to sleep and to wake up. When creating a sleeping schedule, you must regulate the times you sleep on the weekends as well.

3. **Caffeine** – If you're having trouble sleeping at night, it would be best to avoid caffeine. Reported by HelpGuide.org, "Caffeine can cause sleep problems up to ten to twelve hours after drinking it". Sources of caffeine include coffee, tea and soda.
4. **Exercise** – If your sleep is restless, exercise can help. Exercising thirty minutes or more daily makes it easier for you to fall asleep at night. Exercising in the daytime will allow you to be energized for the day and help you obtain a deep sleep at night. Although exercise is great for the body, it is not recommended that you exercise three hours within your bedtime because it will stimulate your body and thus make it more difficult to rest.
5. **Sleeping Environment** – To attain the best quality of sleep it is important to make your room a good sleeping environment. This means you should reserve your bed for sleeping only because "if you associate your bed with events like work or errands, it will be harder to wind down at night" (Smith). This may be difficult in dorms, but you can utilize places like the library, University Union, and your dorm's study lounges for work and study. Other ways to make your room a better sleeping environment is to turn off your computer and television while trying to fall asleep. The slightest amount of light in your bedroom will affect the amount of melatonin, a brain hormone that induces sleeping, in your brain.
6. **Pre-Sleep Routine** – If you lie in awake for hours after going to bed, consider developing a pre-sleep routine. These routines may help your body unwind in order to make it easier for you to sleep and get a deeper night's rest. Some pre-sleep routines include reading a book, listening to relaxing music, taking a warm bath, or drinking chamomile tea.
7. **Stress and Anxiety** – The *Journal of Adolescent Health* reported that sixty eight percent of students stay awake at night due to stress. Although this bad habit is difficult to break there are ways to make adjustments toward change. An effective way of alleviating thoughts of stress in bed is managing your anxiety before you sleep. For example you can look at your planner before going to bed and already knowing what is going on the next day, or make a to-do list for the next day rather than worrying about it mentally at night.
8. **Naps** – To keep up your energy during the day, naps may help. Be aware that naps should be thirty minutes or less, otherwise the body will go into a deeper sleep and think you're going to be sleeping through the night. Afternoon naps are the best time because if you nap too close to bedtime, it can interfere with your circadian rhythm.

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